DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 407 361 SO 028 082

AUTHOR	Silver, Rosalind, Ed.
TITLE	Media and Violence. Part Two: Searching for Solutions. Media & Values 63.
INSTITUTION	Media Action Research Center, Los Angeles, CA.
REPORT NO	ISSN-0149-6980
PUB DATE	93
NOTE	29p.; For related items, see SO 028 077-081. Journal subtitle: "A Cornerstone of the Media Literacy Movement."
AVAILABLE FROM	Center for Media Literacy, 1962 S. Shenandoah, Los Angeles, CA 90034; telephone: 310-559-2944 ($3.50).
PUB TYPE	Collected Works - Serials (022)
JOURNAL CIT	Media & Values; n63 p1-24 Fall 1993
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS	*Mass Media; *Mass Media Effects; Mass Media Role; Secondary Education; Social Studies; Telecommunications; *Television Viewing; Values; *Violence

ABSTRACT

This issue of "Media & Values" explores the influence of mass media and violence in society. The essays present various interpretations of that influence and the implications for the society. A special section entitled "Forum: Searching for Solutions" contains 5 articles. Articles include: (1) "20 Ways to Create a Culture of Caring" (Jay Dover); (2) "Superbowl Commercial Raises Awareness"; (3) "Banding Together for Change"; (4) "Imagine...A Media of Meaning" (Elizabeth Thoman); and (5) "Taking A Stand Against Violent News" (Barbara Osborn). Other articles in the issue are (1) "Challenging the Myths of Media Violence" (Rosalind Silver); (2) "Like Money in the Bank" (Elayne Rapping); (3) "Media Must Tell Truth about Violence" (Deborah Prothrow-Stith); (4) "New Heroes for a New Age" (Arthur Kanegis); (5) "Now, A Word from Mother" (Megan Rosenfeld); (6) "No More Blood at Eleven" (Kitty Felde); (7) "What's Wrong with the Ratings" (Barbara Wilson); and (8) "What Other Countries Do about Ratings" (Joel Federman). (EH)

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US $5 CDN $7
Number 63

Media&Values

A Cornerstone of the Media Literacy Movement

ED 407 361

MEDIA AND VIOLENCE

Part Two: Searching for Solutions

SO 028 082

A New Kind of Media Hero *p. 6*

What's Wrong with the Ratings? *p. 13*

20 Proposals for a Non-Violent Culture *p. 16*

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Media&Values

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ISSN 0149-6980

Media&Values is published quarterly by the Center for Media and Values, an educational not-for-profit membership organization that believes a concern for values in today's media age is not so much knowing all the answers as asking the right questions. The Center is dedicated to the development of a media literate citizenry whose members will have at their command a new way of thinking about and interacting with the media in their lives.

The Center also creates and publishes innovative learning tools — Media Literacy Workshop Kits™ — to empower adults and youth as critical viewers and consumers of media in today's "image culture." As a leading U.S. voice of the worldwide media literacy movement, the Center organizes forums and conferences and maintains an extensive information and resource library on the media issues of our time. Funding for the Center comes from memberships, individual donations, foundation grants and organizational cosponsorships of issues and kits.

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In Canada
85 St. Clair Avenue E, Room 500, Toronto, Ontario M4T 1M8

Library Subscriptions: $35/United States; CDN$45/Canada; US$35/All other countries.

Payment: Please submit payment in U.S. funds, except in Canada where you may place orders with our Toronto office in equivalent Canadian currency.

Change of Address: Postmaster: Send address changes to *Media&Values*, 1962 S. Shenandoah, Los Angeles, CA 90034. Subscribers: Send both old and new address (with mailing label if possible) to the same address. Allow six weeks for correction.

Single Issue Rates: Single copy of this issue, US$5; 5-50 copies, 20% discount plus shipping; 51 or more, 40% discount plus shipping. Outside North America, add 15% for shipping.

Manuscripts: *Media&Values* does not accept unsolicited manuscripts. We do welcome contact with researchers and potential authors whose work is compatible with *Media&Values*' content and style. Send letter with writing samples or research summaries.

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Letters to the Editor: Comments and feedback are always welcome. Write: **Editor,** *Media&Values*, 1962 S. Shenandoah, Los Angeles, CA 90034.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS
Special thanks to the following for their funding support:

- Ms Foundation for Education and Communication, Inc.
- Lawrence Welk Foundation
- Roth Family Foundation
- McCune Foundation
- Sisters of Charity of NY/Executive Council
- Sisters of Charity of St. Elizabeth
- St. Joseph Foundation
- General Board of Global Ministries/ United Methodist Church/Women's Division
- Paulist Fathers
- Carmelite Fathers
- Sisters of Loretto/Special Needs Committee

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Thanks to the Loretto Women's Network for the idea of a "Violence-Free Zone."

CHALLENGING THE MYTHS OF MEDIA VIOLENCE

By Rosalind Silver

"The three networks predicted a lessening of violence in programming. Ten years later it's a hundred times worse."

—Sen. Thomas J. Dodd, 1964

With almost clockwork regularity, every 10 years since the introduction of television, Congress has held hearings on the impact of media violence. Repeatedly, media researchers have testified to the mounting evidence linking media portrayals of violence to aggressive behavior. At every hearing, entertainment industry executives completed the ritual by complaining that the connections could not be proved.

Coming as they did in a long hot summer of concern about escalating societal violence, the 1993 series of hearings caused more than an average amount of industry soul searching and defensiveness. The actions that may yet result remain unclear, although suggested ideas include ratings reform, more sophisticated media monitoring systems, V-chips and other technological devices and the threat of regulation.

In the past, remedies have either not been implemented or have not lasted. Cutting back on media violence has been like swearing off junk food. Sooner or later, the commercial attractions of blood and gore were too tempting, and violent programming once again became a major part of the media menu.

Perhaps the problem lies in trying to isolate a single "solution." The delusion that there is some magic quick fix that can undo decades of decline in social mores and civic virtue—as well as broadcasting regulation and responsibility—is typical, however, of the instant-gratification culture that television has spawned.

There is no one solution to violence.

As we noted in the previous issue (*Part I: Making the Connections*), the parameters of the problem of media violence are many and complex. The resolution must also be multi-layered—and cumulative. Indeed, there is not one solution but only the *search for solutions* which, like any effort at systemic change can be begun today, but will never be finished.

Yes, V-chips may be useful in some families. And the rating system could use some improvements (see p. 13). Self-discipline on the part of the industry is the decent thing for corporate citizens of today's media culture to do, but even that won't cure the systemic nature of violence that now haunts our national psyche.

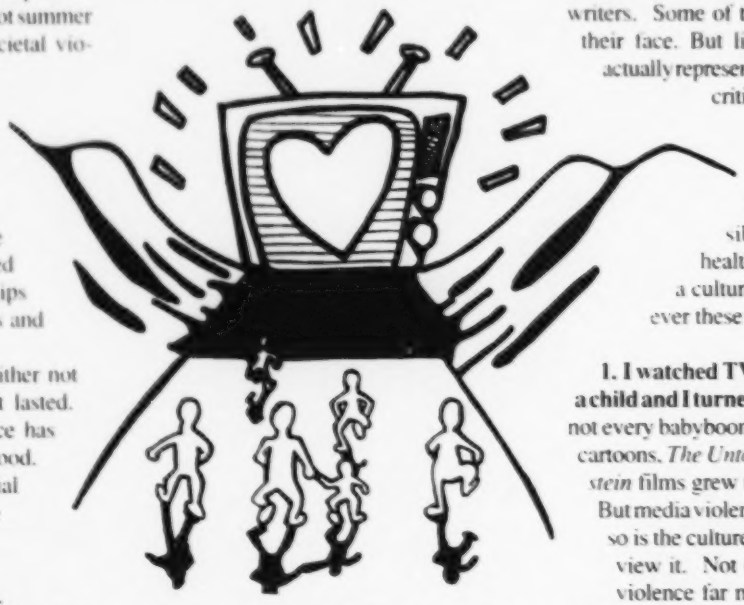


ILLUSTRATION BY JOHN SANTOS

A new resource we've not had in previous decades is the burgeoning media literacy movement. Media literacy provides the framework not just for analyzing what we see but also for understanding the role media has in our culture and taking personal and public action to challenge that role when it intrudes on the common good. Applying media literacy principles and methods to the problem of media violence opens up new possibilities for each of us to first define the situation in our own lives and secondly to learn and apply ways to change it if we wish.

Perhaps more importantly, media literacy can give us the tools to challenge the five myths of media violence, those key arguments that prop up the defense for violence in media. We hear them among respected friends, thoughtful parents, entertainment industry professionals, op-ed writers. Some of them sound logical on their face. But like other myths, they actually represent tired attempts to avoid critical thinking. They support a dangerous status quo and provide excuses for a crucial lack of responsibility for the public health crisis we are facing as a culture. It's time to end forever these worn-out myths:

1. I watched TV violence when I was a child and I turned out OK. It's true that not every babyboomer who watched early cartoons, *The Untouchables* or *Frankenstein* films grew up to be a serial killer. But media violence is different now and so is the culture in which our children view it. Not only are depictions of violence far more graphic and gory today thanks to special effects and computer animation techniques but violence in current media serves to validate a culture that is already violent as a result of poverty, drugs, unemployment and the ready availability of guns. Furthermore the in-your-face attitudes of pranksters like Beavis and Butt-head present not just violent behaviors but cynical attitudes about the mean-

ing of life, the value of community and the dignity of the human person.

Of far more consequence, perhaps, than worrying about whether children will become serial killers are the three other effects of media violence that recent researchers have identified: feeling fearful (the victim effect); turning their backs on those in need (bystander effect); and having an increasing appetite for violence all their lives.

2. Violence in the media just reflects violence in society. Yes, art reflects life. Producers of newsmagazine and reality shows, movies of the week and theatrical films carefully monitor the news for real-life stories that might make dramatic programming. Unfortunately, they are convinced—with justification—that violence succeeds better than other programming in capturing viewers' attention.

But in fact TV and films depict much more violence than exists in real life. No one experiences the kind of routine violence (five acts of violence per hour in prime time; 25 or more in children's shows) that is depicted on TV every day. This sensational violence has a leading effect on society. Ever more violent programming and films contribute to escalating amounts of violence in society. This real-life violence is then reprocessed by media producers into new, more violent programs. It's time to stop this cycle of violence.

We must create a culture where our children can grow up safe, healthy and whole. But we can't do it waiting for someone else.

3. Decisions about viewing violence should be up to parents. In this century, the mass media have come to rival parents, school and religion as the most influential institution in children's lives. In fact, one study indicates that teenagers are more likely to believe the media than their parents when the two disagree. Most parents try to insure that outside influences — teachers, friends, relatives — are positive influences on their children. But the stream of media that flows into the average household is overwhelming.

Those who are parents today have a daunting task. Unlike parents of the past, they must acquire new media management techniques to protect their children from harm along with media literacy skills that will teach the next generation self-discipline, critical evaluation and self-awareness. But parents today also have a right to expect society to support their child-rearing efforts with a healthy physical, intellectual, spiritual *and cultural* environment.

4. Violence is a natural part of drama. Somehow Shakespeare always comes up at this point. Yes, he was a great playwright, but the best of his plays retain their impact because their violent climaxes are accompanied by skillful character development and what media scholar Brian Stonehill calls "a sense of the preciousness and fragility of life." Conversely, Stonehill notes, much of today's mass media crime fare "makes us feel that life is cheap and disposable."

What drama does require is not so much violence as *conflict*, which is best when viewers can relate it to the circumstances of their own lives. As Arthur Kanegis points out in "New Heroes for a New Age" (p. 7-8), violence is not the only way to solve conflict in even the best of dramas.

5. Media producers should be free to create any images they want. After all, that's what the U.S. Constitution provides. The political and artistic freedom guaranteed by the First Amendment is indeed a resource to treasure. But it was never intended to completely eliminate all forms of social control over expression. Long ago jurists decided that free speech did not protect the right "to shout fire in a crowded theater."

Movie and television producers must be able to create what they envision. But because we live in a systemically violent culture, it seems irresponsible for the creative community to allow their imaginations unbridled rein, put the images out there and walk away, saying: "I'm an artist so I have no responsibility for how my images affect society."

We do need to be cautious in how we interpret this principle in regard to popular media. But while we wait for judicial wheels to grind slowly, media literacy education in schools and churches and community centers can shape public opinion to influence the media marketplace *without* the need for Congressional or other government regulation.

With these myths exploded we can begin the task of building a new, less violent culture. Throughout the pages of this issue are dozens of ideas for getting started. Some will be familiar ("How the V-chip Works," p. 19); others may be innovative, like the idea for a "violence free zone" depicted on our front cover. Note the many community and family-centered ideas resulting from our recent Consultation on Challenging the Culture of Violence (p. 16-20).

With our society in crisis, it's no time to sit on the sidelines. Your help is needed. We must break the cycle of blame and accusation on this issue. If there is to be a future for any of us, we must create a culture where our children can grow up safe, healthy and whole. But we can't do it waiting for someone else. If we want there to be "peace on earth."—as well as an end to media violence—we must also remember the second line of the song: "so let it begin with me."

Rosalind Silver is editor of Media&Values *magazine. Barbara Osborn also contributed to this story.*

'Something New is Waiting to be Born'

Our world is in travail. It takes no special sensitivity to realize how pervasive is the stress to which the fabric of our contemporary lives is subjected. Over and over again violence tears apart what, often, it has taken centuries to fashion.

And yet violence is not the substance, it is the symptom. Something new is waiting to be born. We are experiencing the birth pangs of a new age, of a new hope. We are present at that sacred moment when new life is about to emerge from the womb of the past...

The questions which address themselves to each of us are: Will we recognize the mystery of this possibility? Will we be open to its opportunities? Are we willing to help it be pulled into the light of tomorrow? Will we turn away preoccupied or cynical, or will we step forward to assist?

—Rabbi Herman Schaalman

LIKE MONEY IN THE BANK

Understanding Media's Investment in Violence

By Elayne Rapping

There was something suspicious about the spring 1993 *Newsweek* cover story glaringly headed "Violence Goes Mainstream" and subtitled, "Movies, Music, Books—Are There any Limits Left?" Here's a clue: After stating with predictable alarm that media violence, previously to be found (according to *Newsweek*) "on the fringes of mass culture," has now reached "the station-wagon set, bumper to bumper at the local Cinema 1-2-3-4-5," the writers go on to assign blame. Who done it? "The amalgamated, conglomerated media corporations" which irresponsibly and greedily "churn out increasingly vicious movies, books and records," of course. Who did you think?

The problem is that *Newsweek* itself is a central part of that conglomerated media world. My point is not the obvious one that public outrage over media violence is circular and hypocritical, although it is. To end the discussion there is to contribute to the confusion, to raise circularity to yet another level.

The real issue is motive. Why do the media constantly engage in this kind of *mea culpa* exercise? Are they sincerely interested in killing their own fatted calf by doing away with their most lucrative commodity—sensationalism? Not likely.

Attention Diverted

So what's really going on here? By projecting outrage and dismay, the media divert attention from the real issues—on the one hand, the relationship of media violence to actual social violence and, on the other, the media's own involvement and investment in violence. Two assumptions pervade—and mystify—the public discourse on the "problem" of violence in the media. First is the question of quantity—the notion that the sheer number and intensity of violent representations is the key to how serious the problem is: The more violence, the worse for society. This brings us to the question of effects—the implication that media violence causes social violence and that, by extension, more media violence causes more societal violence.

These assumptions are not totally false. Common sense tells us there is some kind of relationship between what we see and what we believe and do. If that were not the case, art would have no power at all. But the fuzziness of the thinking about "causes" and "effects" leaves out intentions. It assumes, implicitly, a McLuhanesque kind of self-directing technology that somehow has an innate affinity for violence. "The camera loves violence," [director] Brian de Palma has said, but it is de Palma himself who loves violence, just as it is always human beings, with personal agency and intent, who create and enable media violence.

Public discourse on media violence rarely conveys a sense of social, political, or economic context. It is as if people—like subjects of the very laboratory experiments used to "prove" the media's responsibility for violence—were locked up in isolated little rooms with nothing but media experience to respond to. This is nonsense.

In fact, it is only the obscurantism of the "objective" social science methodology used by communications scholars that induces us to forget the role of the real world in people's violent behavior and, more interestingly, in the content of the media. Does television think up this stuff with its little electronic brain and imagination? Was there no violence before media? We can't simply ignore the way media violence reflects and reinforces what is already out there.

Glorifying Violence

The people who create media content aren't off in some ivory tower of creative spontaneity, operating without guidelines. They work for cultural organizations which, as Raymond Williams reminded us long ago, are "both in themselves and in their frequent interlock or integration with other institutions...part of the whole social and economic organization at its most pervasive."

In other words, there are powerful corporations and governments which fund and regulate media and make the rules about what gets aired and what doesn't.

If media cause violence, who causes media? By ignoring themselves—as *Newsweek* does, for instance—the media self-analysis perpetuates an illogical but widely held theory: that we, as a society, abhor violence but somehow got ourselves mass media that love it and feed it to us to

the point where we become "addicted." This, too, is nonsense.

We, as a society, love violence, sanction violence, thrive on violence as the very basis of our social stability, our ideological belief system. As Rap Brown used to say in the 1960s, "Violence is as American as cherry pie."

It should hardly be surprising, then, that our mass media and entertainment systems glorify violence. It is our national pastime. It is the favorite tool of our leaders. It is, most recently, the source of our nation's "finest hour," the great Nintendo war against the heathen Arab hordes. Did anyone worry that the media ecstasy over the destruction of Baghdad might induce television viewers to commit acts of violence? As a nation, we engage in massive, atrocious acts of violence, and the media spurs us on. Why is this less troubling or less interesting than the case of a single murderer known to have liked to watch horror films?

We, as a society, love violence, sanction violence, thrive on violence as the very basis of our social stability, our ideological belief system.

Violent Technology

If there is more media violence today, that is because there is more real and potential violence. We have the technological means of annihilating ourselves and others in spectacular and gruesome ways, and this technology is increasingly available to broader segments of the population. This is understandably scary, and people are right to be fascinated by it. It is a crucial issue in our public life. It is a matter that needs to be understood, to be symbolically acted out in terms of public narratives which seem to explain and contain the terrifying subject.

The mass media provide this service, just as art always has. For the most part, the media present myths and symbolic narratives which distort and obscure the realities of social violence, taking agency and responsibility away from the social structure that actually benefits from it and projecting it onto other kinds of symbolic beings—monsters, demons, cabals of futuristic conspirators. But sometimes, in the hands of innovative artists, the dominant genres and narratives are subverted and larger social truths emerge about the real nature of violence in America—who really causes it and who benefits from it.

This is the context within which we should evaluate media products. Two... publicized works of violent fiction, Jonathan Demme's [1992] film, *The Silence of the Lambs*, and Bret Easton Ellis's novel, *American Psycho*, have been singled out for their portrayals of some of the most vicious acts yet presented to media audiences. *American Psycho*, about a yuppie banker who goes around torturing and murdering various oppressed people for the fun of it, has been roundly attacked and even boycotted by feminists for its depictions of rape and the torture of women.

The Silence of the Lambs, on the other hand, which shows a young woman FBI agent singlehandedly capturing a mass murderer and torturer of women, has been treated as a serious and intelligent work of art. Yet it seems to me that of the two works, *The Silence of the Lambs* is by far the more offensive and symbolically threatening to women...

Both of these works are horrifying in their mystification of the real sources of class and gender violence.... Such fantasies use symbolic acts of violence to purge us of the horror of class injustice without ever displaying it in its true form. Poverty is a form of physical torture, but its form is complex and its perpetrators are vast and invisible.

We have the technological means of annihilating ourselves and others in spectacular and gruesome ways, and this technology is increasingly available to broader segments of the population.

American Psycho's simplistic scapegoat is metaphorically and emotionally useful but politically and intellectually mystifying... The problem is that Ellis's hero is a madman and a monster and what he does is projected as a physical, rather than political or economic, act of genocide.

The real monster in [*Silence of the Lambs*] is not the pathetic if terrifying transvestite killer, but another mass murderer, the brilliant psychiatrist and cannibalistic killer Hannibal Lecter, played with suave and sexy charm by Anthony Hopkins. He is the expert Starling [the FBI agent] consults for help...

Analyze Social Realities

The point of these observations is not to call for censorship. After all, whose criteria, whose "readings" of these texts would we use? Jesse Helms'? We need to analyze them for what they reveal about social realities hidden beneath cultural myths. We need to educate ourselves in critical thinking. Popular art gives clues to social truths we ought to understand.

Even if we were to favor some form of censorship, the current thinking wouldn't help us much. Its equation of numbers and "badness" is obviously wrong. Meaning isn't interpreted by counting but by analyzing according to qualitative criteria. It isn't number of bodies (relatively few) that makes *The Silence of the Lambs* more disturbing than *American Psycho*. It is the elegant and attractive portrayal of misogyny as a terrifying, sexy game. The novel is ugly and its hero is vile. The film is entertaining and its hero/villain is a classic cinematic hunk.

But, most importantly, we need to resist the censorship argument because it is so likely to backfire. No matter how much we deplore the sleaze and gore, we must keep a clear head about how they are used. Sleaze and gore are, after all, sometimes the most effective agents of consciousness-raising. It all depends on the nature of the work being considered. Films like *GoodFellas* or *River's Edge*, which depict wholly amoral, sociopathic acts of murder, are, in fact, attacks on the social realities supporting and encouraging violence.

A TV movie like *The Burning Bed*, which tells the story of Francine Hughes, the battered wife who set her husband's body on fire and was acquitted, was actually exemplary in its feminist depiction of the many social, cultural and economic rea-

sons for the epidemic of woman-battering. It revealed, in horrifying detail, the ideological and institutional factors that allowed Hughes—and so many other women—to suffer through years of torture without legal, social or familial support.

The day after the movie aired, to an audience of 75 million, many women left their abusive husbands for shelters they did not previously know existed. On the other hand, four women burned their husbands to death and one man set his wife on fire. How does one evaluate the "effects" of this very violent film? Did it cause five acts of violence or was its effect far more subtle and significant? Would we want it to be toned down or even censored?

Hardly. In fact, a comparison of *The Burning Bed* and *The Silence of the Lambs* reveals how art works, in its technique, to suggest meanings that are in no way related to the raw content of what the films present. Both films show vicious men torturing women. But camera angles, point of view, social detail and context all serve to make the two films different in emotional effect. One creates a creepy fantasy of superhuman evil and lets sexism triumph dramatically; the other pulls the masks away from institutional complicity in domestic violence.

So where does this leave us? With luck, a few steps ahead of the *Newsweek* syndrome, the hypocritical and endless media ploy of screaming "Ain't it awful!" and "Let's ban it!" The problem, after all, is not media violence but real violence. We need to focus on the causes and the nature of that phenomenon.

The media will be as violent as the world that creates them. Sometimes that's disturbing, but sometimes it is salutary. The media, like other public arenas, are a battleground—contested terrain in which ideological meanings are played out. As consumers, critics, and artists, we have to be in the game. But first we must know the rules.

Elayne Rapping teaches communications at Adelphi University in New York City. She is the author of The Movie of the Week: Private Stories, Public Events. *A collection of her articles,* Mediations: Forays Into the Gender and Culture Wars, *is soon to be published. The original version of this article first appeared in* The Progressive. *It is reprinted by permission.*

Media Must Tell Truth About Violence

An Interview with
Deborah Prothrow-Stith, M.D.

Currently the assistant dean of the Harvard School of Public Health, Dr. Prothrow-Stith is the author of Deadly Consequences: How Violence Is Destroying Our Teenage Population and a Plan to Begin Solving the Problem. Media&Values *Editor Rosalind Silver talked to her about the media's role in violence prevention.*

M&V: *The title of your book chapter about media is "Teaching Our Kids To Kill." Is that what you believe the media does?*

Prothrow-Stith: I used to focus on society's failure to teach nonviolent alternatives to day to day problems. But I've come to see that more and more we use the media to teach children that violence is a way of life. We also present violence not just as a natural thing, but as funny and entertaining. Children begin to learn this lesson from their first cartoons and super heroes, before moving on to the high-tech violence of action movies for adults. By the time they're teenagers, using violence to resolve conflict seems very natural to them. As a result, it shouldn't surprise us that some of them end up using violence as a way to deal with their problems.

To break the cycle, we have to develop other solutions—in the home, in the school and in the classroom. And we have to teach kids to value peaceful solutions to disagreements with others.

M&V: *How can we work to change these attitudes?*

Prothrow-Stith: There are three levels to any public health campaign. For example, in an anti-smoking campaign, you first try to prevent young people from becoming smokers. Then, behavior modification and other techniques are designed to encourage current smokers to quit. The third level, treatment of people who already have lung cancer or other smoking-related health problems, is really too late.

The money our society spends on police and prisons is equivalent to the third level of violence prevention, and it's also too late. Our spending on preventative measures is very small by comparison. We need to work with younger children, especially children at risk, before they begin to see violence as an alternative.

M&V: *What role can the media play?*

Prothrow-Stith: Telling the truth about violence is the most important. Media must make it clear that violence doesn't solve problems; it creates them. Stop sanitizing and glamorizing violence by showing the impact of violence on victims, their families, police and the perpetrators themselves. Violence ruins lives.

Instead, the media should find ways to portray nonviolence as sophisticated and "cool." And of all the things that happen in a day, why do newspeople pick the violent things to highlight in news programs?

M&V: *What are some other things you'd like to see on the news?*

Prothrow-Stith: I'd like to see the kid from Roxbury who wins the chess championship, the urban single mother whose child graduates from college, the kids who clean up the neighborhood.

News programs that focus on the negative create fear on the part of viewers—what communication theorist George Gerbner calls the "mean world syndrome." And these fears also have the effect of isolating suburban from urban communities. Our news reporting presents a view of the "other," creating an image of violence out of a combination of racism and classism.

M&V: *How can it be changed?*

Prothrow-Stith: I'd like see it reflect the facts. The stranger/bad guy model leaves most homicides and many other forms of violence unaccounted for. Most murderers know their victims, for example. The model ignores other forms of interpersonal violence, including suicide, all too common among white middle school kids.

In this country we assume that violence is a natural part of the human condition. But our violence rate is four times greater than our nearest competitor. Clearly, our culture is more violent than others, and we need to figure out how to change that.

NEW HEROES FOR A NEW AGE

Stories of Nonviolence Inspire the Best in Us

By Arthur Kanegis

I'm riding on a subway in New York City when I see a ballet-like hand weave between the packed-in crowd and slip into a pocket. What you did isn't right," I find myself declaring to the young man connected to the hand. "What?" he shouts, drawing back empty-handed. "I'll cut you. I'll dice you."

The entire subway car falls silent. You could hear a pin drop. I'm looking him dead in the eye. He's looking at me. The subway door opens. He turns and walks off mumbling and cursing. The entire subway car bursts into a cheer.
—Linda Carel, a rapper describing a 1988 incident

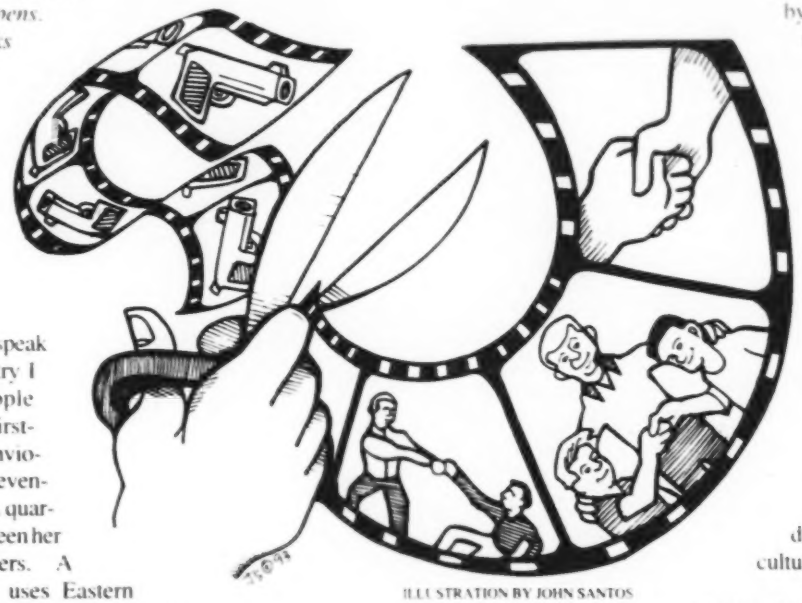


ILLUSTRATION BY JOHN SANTOS

In every audience I speak to around the country I find ordinary people with remarkable first-hand stories of nonviolent heroism. A seven-year-old girl stops a quarrel by stepping between her two fighting brothers. A veteran policeman uses Eastern meditation techniques to peacefully disarm a crazed, knife-wielding murderer. A mother refuses to play "victim" to a carjacker and disarms him by connecting with the pained little boy inside him.

A man once told me, in hushed tones, of talking his way out of a fight. "You know, I've never told this to anyone."

"Why not?" I asked.

"Well, I don't know. I was kind of embarrassed—that I didn't kick the shit out of the guy—like John Wayne—like all the heroes you see in the movies."

Many of us model and evaluate our behavior on the basis of our cultural heroes. Thus, as a nation, our choice of heroes has a fundamental effect on the kind of society we develop. Every society needs its heroes—someone to help inspire dreams and shape goals.

A boy or girl who grows up watching a cartoon G.I. Joe subdue and pin down a bikini-clad "evil" temptress may develop a different self-concept than one who spends his or her time enthralled by the biographies of historical and contemporary heroes and heroines like Thomas Jefferson, Jane Addams, Martin Luther King Jr., Simon Bolivar, Stephen Biko, Mohandas Gandhi, Mother Teresa or Eleanor Roosevelt.

Given our mass culture's current glorification of criminal and violent heroes, is it any wonder that Americans are killing, maiming, raping and robbing each other at a furious rate—a rate which exceeds that of every other nation that keeps records? According to a March, 1991 Senate Judiciary Committee report, the United States is "the most violent and self-destructive nation on earth."

Could there be a connection between our choice of heroes and the epidemic of violence sweeping our society?

Mythological interpreter Joseph Campbell observed that since the beginning of civilization, the behavior of every society has been largely molded by its storytellers and myth makers.

In the days of old, stories of the heroic warriors were used to inspire young men to become soldiers and young women to want to marry them. The warrior would either win—building an empire of power, seizing a bounty of riches and securing safety for his society—or lose, bringing shame, subjugation and poverty to his people. The old myth that we have only two choices—fight or flight—is deeply ingrained in many cultures.

A Better Idea

Yet, there is another way—an awesome power, radically different from the old world view of fight or flight, conquer or be conquered, that has proven itself in dramatic confrontations on the personal, national and global scale. However, we are often so locked into the old mindset that we fail to see what is before our very eyes.

For example, when the people of Moscow stood up to the Red Army during the 1989 coup, the world braced for what it believed to be inevitable. The tanks would roll, the KGB would assassinate the leaders and the people would be massacred. The

SIGNE WILKINSON (1993) REPRINTED WITH PERMISSION, CARTOONISTS & WRITERS SYNDICATE

U.S. Marines, the CIA, even our 26,000 nuclear weapons stood by, impotent and obsolete. No force seemed powerful enough to stop the onslaught.

Instead, the unexpected occurred. The people of Moscow introduced their babies to the tank drivers, put flowers in their gun barrels and appealed to them as human beings. Conscience and a sense of shared identity proved mightier than the sword and, in a dramatic, nonviolent confrontation, Moscow was liberated and an empire crumbled.

We watched it all on TV—but did we *see* it? Did commentators marvel at this awesome display of nonviolent power? Did producers rush out to be the first with the "movie of the week," replaying the emotion of this dramatic nonviolent confrontation? Not at all. Instead of seizing on this truly "new" happening, newscasters failed to even notice the world-shaking force that had just been displayed. Rather, they chose to focus on questions like: "Why did the coup leaders lose their nerve? What was their weakness?"

Challenging the Myth

The mass media stories in our culture are imbued with the warrior ethos of millennia—the "myth of redemptive violence," as theologian Walter Wink called it in the last issue of *Media&Values*. This mindset focuses on the tale of good conquering evil, not with goodness but with superior violence. We are so conditioned to accept this view of the power of violence that we don't quite have a framework to see the emerging power of nonviolence.

For decades we have witnessed dramatic nonviolent revolutions that swept the old guard out of power, first in India, then the American South and more recently in the Philippines, Poland, and elsewhere around the world. In the Middle East, this year's decision between the Israelis and Palestinians to mutually recognize is another example. But these nonviolent dramas are usually seen as an aberration—something that happened because of special circumstances—not any reason to change our perceptions and re-examine the basic myths of our old-style cultural heroes.

Part of the problem is linguistic. The word "nonviolence" is inadequate for the alternative force we are discussing. It sounds soft, implying the passive acceptance of abuse and injustice. In fact it is just the opposite. The courage required for a nonviolent confrontation with force is incalculable.

When Medgar Evers was shot down in Mississippi on his "march against fear" through the South in 1963 during the height of the Civil Rights movement, Martin Luther King Jr. and other civil rights leaders picked up the banner. They faced rocks and knives and guns. They resisted frustrated supporters' calls for retaliatory violence.

Despite their refusal to fight back, their actions were anything but passive. Leaders of the movement knew that a physical confrontation was exactly what the white power structure of Jackson, Mississippi wanted. Violence would have taken the battle into an arena where police and city leaders had the upper hand. The reality is that armed conflict is a weaker, less effective, more cowardly, more fear-based response than the drastic action—the last resort—of facing violence with unarmed courage.

Simple acts of courage can be inspiring

Working to Create New Media Heroes

Future WAVE (Working for Alternatives to Violence in Entertainment) is a nonprofit organization working within the entertainment industry to research, develop and promote positive alternatives to violence and incorporate those alternatives into popular movies and TV programs. Projects include the movie *Astrocops: Peacekeepers of the Future*, currently in development, and *Legend of the Bullyproof Shields*, a "Rap 'n Roll opera" based in part on Native American mythology. To donate to this effort or to contribute stories of nonviolence in action, contact Future WAVE, Inc., at 105 Camino Teresa, Santa Fe, NM 87501, (505)982-8882, FAX (505)982-6460, or call Future WAVE's Los Angeles office, (310)823-0440.

and contagious. I think they are cinematic. I think they'd give audiences a rush — and some new kinds of heroes and heroines.

Spurred by public criticism, the leaders of the film and television industry are currently searching for ways to reduce the display of media violence. During the industry's summer 1993 conference on television violence, I listened as network executives struggled with the question: How can media creators attract and excite audiences, retain the impact of dramatic narrative and at the same time eliminate or tone down scenes whose impact depends on excessive and gratuitous violence?

In an industry built on imagination, the participants seemed remarkably lacking in vision. They debated whether the murders should be shown on screen, to demonstrate the consequences of violence, or should happen off screen, to save us from the gruesome details.

They missed the point.

What is needed is not the same old story with the violence sanitized. Kids do know there is violence out there in the world—even right at home and in their schools and neighborhoods. What they need are the tools of good conflict management and resolution. They need new role models to show the way to a greater power than violence. They need new kinds of "beyond macho" heroes of both sexes and all races.

"Turning off" the violence in media is not enough. We must also "turn on" stories that will provide role models for children and adults.

J. William Gibson, in his forthcoming book *Warrior Dreams*, suggests that only by creating new kinds of heroes, new myths, can we begin to turn around our culture of violence. Only then can we begin to reduce the level of real violence in our nation and in our world. He points out that any attempt to create a new mythology must provide adventure and a new ritual for male passage from boyhood to manhood—and a new definition of manhood that sees child rearing as a manly virtue.

Three Positive Concepts

How does the Hollywood community learn to create such nonviolent heroes? Essentially, a nonviolent approach boils down to three common elements that appear in virtually all of the stories of effective nonviolent action:

1. Courage. Don't be afraid. Attackers smell fear; they are full of it themselves. They expect screaming, begging, pleading. Their guns or knives have the power to get them what they want only if their opponents fear them. If their opponents are not afraid, attackers' weapons lose much of their power.

"Too many youngsters today mistake American sports heroes and entertainers for role models... [Kids] have to understand the triumph in being an 'average member' of our society."

Montel Williams, talk show host

2. Humanity. See the human being behind the violent deed. Speak to his or her condition. Treat the person with love, respect and understanding, taking time to listen to what's exploding inside rather than reacting to it.

3. Initiative. Originate a reframed situation. Don't play into their game, draw them into yours. Draw your opponent into the nonviolent interaction you have set up. Create the framework for a solution in which both sides win.

These three steps—Courage, Humanity, Initiative—create the acronym "CHI." In oriental philosophy, Chi is the kind of soul energy, heart power that can turn around a dangerous situation—rather than fight an opposing energy, you embrace it and turn it so it is going your way.

Have you, the reader, had an experience of countering violence with CHI? I believe it is time we started telling *our* stories to the storytellers. I believe we can all help the entertainment industry develop new kinds of heroes and heroines who resonate creative action and transformational power. Writers, producers and directors now have an opportunity to use their powerful skills to reshape our way of looking at the world. When they do, they can help kids—and presidents—learn to play a better game than war.

Arthur Kanegis is a lecturer, writer and the founder of Future WAVE: Working for Alternatives to Violence in Entertainment. He is also president of 2020 Productions, Inc., and is co-producing a feature film with Robert Watts, producer of Indiana Jones, Return of the Jedi, Roger Rabbit *and* Alive.

Anger Management Skills Can Help Media Create Positive Role Models

Recognizing that poorly managed anger is at the root of many serious physical, social and emotional problems, including violence, the Institute for Mental Health Initiatives (IMHI) has launched a public education campaign on anger.

IMHI has been working with writers, producers and directors to accurately portray constructive role models of behavior. IMHI's quarterly publication, *Dialogue: Insights into Human Emotions for Creative Professionals*, provides valuable research on a particular mental health topic and is mailed to 20,000 members of the creative community.

Specifically, IMHI encourages media professionals to:

- Show a variety of constructive anger management behaviors that empower both the characters and the viewers.
- Depict violence as a last resort for heroes who have used their wits in encountering danger.
- Depict the perpetrators of "thoughtless" violence as villains and their use of weapons as weak and foolish.
- Portray the devastating emotional consequences and impact of violence on the perpetrators, the victims and witnesses.

IMHI has been involved in helping several organizations to create a series of public service announcements on violence prevention. One PSA was the result of a contest for college students that IMHI co-sponsored with the National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences in Washington, D.C.

For more information, contact Institute for Mental Health Initiatives, 4545 42nd Street, N.W., Suite 311, Washington, D.C., 20016, (202) 364-7111.

NOW, A WORD FROM MOTHER

A Parent's Perspective on Violence in the Media

By Megan Rosenfeld

ILLUSTRATION BY ROLLIN MCGRAIL. USED WITH PERMISSION, THE WASHINGTON POST

I was sent to a Capitol Hill press conference at which the major networks announced their new plan to label violent television shows. It was a last-minute assignment, and I grabbed the only note pad I could find in the house. Once I sat down in the crowded and tension-filled hearing room in the Dirksen Senate Office Building, I turned to the top page of the note pad and found a drawing by my nine-year-old son—of a beautifully detailed weapon carefully labeled "infinity war mutant bounty gun."

So, guys, I said to myself as I leaned back and looked at the suits lined up at the microphone, tell me about violence on TV.

There has been a lot of moaning in reaction to these labels. One side, the anti-violence lobby, says they're a palliative, a crumb tossed at the mob to stall legislators from actually regulating the airwaves, a license to produce even more violence as long as it's labeled.

The other side, the so-called "creative community" and the civil liberties dogmatists, is crying about artistic freedom and the First Amendment. Labeling, they say, is the first step down the slippery slope of censorship. "I think we are being enormously scapegoated," producer Dick Wolf of *Law and Order* told this newspaper [*The Washington Post*]. If you listen to Congress, it's [as if] television is the root of all social ills in this country."

Oh, please. I find myself curiously unmoved by television producers covering themselves with a First Amendment flag. As far as I'm concerned, they have abrogated their rights to freedom of speech by being so resolutely unconcerned about the impact of what they put on television. That includes the 100,000 acts of violence that the average child will have watched by the end of elementary school. Too often television is not about protecting speech, [but] protecting a business. Pretending otherwise is foolish.

The much-lauded Steven Bochco's new series on ABC, *NYPD Blue*, has been widely predicted to "push the envelope" of profanity, nudity and artistic violence. What happens when he gets bored with the show, as he did with *L.A. Law*, and leaves it in the hands of lesser mortals? We'll be left with a flabby envelope and no art.

An Unfortunate Tradition

We have an unfortunate tradition in this country of putting the "rights" of adults before the needs of children. You can see that demonstrated everyday in courthouses, classrooms and social work bureaucracies everywhere. Television is no exception.

Every socially useful change that has been made in recent years—like the elimination of cigarette and liquor advertising or identifying the early evening hours for "family" viewing—has been forced down the networks' throats. Somehow, I am not convinced that they want to use the First Amendment in my family's interest.

"The whole issue is very circular," Marcy Kelly, president of a Los Angeles-based watchdog and education group called Mediascope, told *CQ Researcher*. "The writer will say, 'That's what the producer wants me to write.' The producer will say, 'That's what the network wants.' The network will say, 'That's what the advertisers want.' The advertisers will say, 'That's what the public wants.' The question is, how can we break the circle?"

Well, I have a few ideas.

Misreading the Viewer

First, the notion that blood is what the

public wants is not borne out by the facts. The 20 top-rated network shows include only two—*Rescue 911* and *Unsolved Mysteries*—that could conceivably be classified as violent. Most of the top-rated shows are sitcoms or newsmagazines—in other words, just programs that consist of tasteless jokes, sexual and racial stereotypes, and the occasional thoughtful, well-researched expose. But not violence.

A Times-Mirror survey of more than 1,500 adults released in March 1993 found that 80 percent thought that television violence—whether on networks or cable—was harmful to society, compared with 64 percent who thought so in 1983. The number who thought it was "very harmful" (as opposed to just plain harmful) increased from 26 percent to 47 percent. The most frequent viewers of violent programs were those under the age of 30.

Do people watch violent shows because that is what's there? If television producers really confronted the issue, they would have to admit that throwing another fistfight or chokehold into the script is an easy way to create tension and drama, while doing it with words and nonviolent plot twists is much harder...

Parent's Prerogative

Whenever I interview people in the film or television business I always ask them if they restrict or monitor their child's television watching. They always say they do. Steven Spielberg, for example, said he tried to control what his children watch, although, he admitted, "not enough." And when asked about the question of violence on television, he said, "There's nothing we can do about it except continue to be critical. To protect our children we must be hypocrites."

I guess that's me.

I am not a person who wants to eradicate all trash on television. Nor do I think Looney Tunes should be listed among the most violent shows, as the National Coalition on Television Violence does. I have friends, and even relatives, who write for and act on television, and other friends who would love to do so. I am happy to assert my responsibility as a parent... I know that little boys will draw pictures of guns, and always have drawn pictures of guns, regardless of how much violence they see on television. And I do not think a television show causes someone to go out and commit murder; it just gives them an excuse after the fact.

...television is a tool you should teach your children to master, not avoid... Throwing it out is a solution, but that doesn't teach children to make choices.

But I admit it: If there were such a thing as the Taste Police, I would want to be the chief. We all think we know what's best, especially when it comes to our children. And tell me, have the presidents of NBC, CBS, ABC and the schlock specialists at Fox Broadcasting done such a great job of looking out for our interests?

Mastering the Television

I have always believed that television is a tool you should teach your children to master, not avoid, because it is unavoidable. Throwing it out is a solution, but that doesn't teach children to make choices. In my household, we don't allow television on school nights, for example, and we try to limit it at other times. But the pull of the black box in the corner is always there, and rare is the day that my kids don't ask, "Can I watch TV?" And then "Why not?"

I could use some help. I feel as if I spend too much time as a parent censoring and saying no, and fighting off the unceasing lures thrown out by the [CBS President] Howard Stringers of the world.

A technological aid—a device that would allow me to block out programs I expect to be inappropriate—fills me with a combination of dread and curiosity. I will never buy those 500 channels we are being promised. But spending some of my rare nonworking hours programming a week's worth of television blockage is not my idea of quality time.

A call to Circuit City elicited the information that I can now buy a television with a "parent control capability." I could program when it would turn on and off and block out some channels. This would cost me only between $600 and $700. Perhaps Steven Bochco would like to buy me one.

My stepson told me someone has invented a bicycle-powered television, which would certainly cut down on viewing in our household. I'm not sure it really deals with the violence question, however.

So, for now, I'll take the labels. I would prefer that the creators of television would produce less violence, but perhaps this initiative will help make that happen. It is, at least, an acknowledgement that what they put on the air really does affect human life, and for that I am grateful. Previously, network executives sold advertising on the premise that commercials would prod us lowly viewers to buy products, but refused to admit that the programs surrounding the commercials could possibly influence anyone to do anything.

I hope the industry, including the cable operators and independent producers who refused to sign on to the two-year labeling experiment, will take seriously the companion plan to sensitize producers, writers and program developers to violence. The objective is to do for violence what they did for seat belts, drug use and cigarette and alcohol consumption—glamorize the good stuff and downplay the bad.

There is a real possibility that nothing will change. In that case I will have no choice: I will have to take the television out and throw a bomb at it. I sure hope nobody else will be hit by the flying debris.

Megan Rosenfeld is a Washington Post *staff writer.* *©1993* The Washington Post. *Reprinted with permission.*

Nonviolent Media Ideas for Parents

- Help your children select programs.
- Set guidelines and limits about what is appropriate family viewing.
- Be aware of what your children are watching.
- Be a good role model and don't watch violent shows.
- Watch television with your children and talk about what you see and what it means.
- Use your VCR to tape thoughtful and selective entertainment.
- Encourage children to become involved in more active free time activities: sports, hobbies, reading.

NO MORE BLOOD AT ELEVEN

TV News Needs to Report Conflict Responsibly

By Kitty Felde

I made a resolution years ago to stop watching cop shows right before I went to bed. The corpses and car chases gave me nightmares. More and more often, the broadcasts open with the "nightside" reporter standing in front of the blood-soaked pavement next to the coroner's van. Now it's the real life corpses that are keeping me up nights.

It didn't used to be this way. A couple of years ago, it was fashionable to lead with a catastrophe made "good television." These days, fires are out. Today, if it bleeds, it leads.

Ironically, crime stories usually provide a dearth of interesting images for a medium that relies so heavily on pictures. *Washington Post* TV columnist Jack Carmody says local coverage of crime stories "make lousy TV." "It's never very dramatic," he says, "the reporter relating the latest horror within the glare of police lights with yellow crime tape flapping in the wind."

Yet, Reed Manville, the general manager of NBC's affiliate in Los Angeles, defends his station's preoccupation with violence. He says viewers want to see crime stories. "It makes them feel better about their own situation," to know "that it's not their family."

I disagree. Crime stories do not make us feel better. They scare the dickens out of us. Sure, scary stuff has always been good copy from Edgar Allan Poe to "Halloween, Part 25." In fact, newspapers owe their rise in popularity at the end of the last century to the orgy of crime crammed onto their front pages. Today we criticize such reporting as "yellow journalism." What will future generations call the kind of news we put on the air today?

But why look ahead to the distant future? What messages are we sending to the youngest generation of viewers watching today? Bad guys get their 15 minutes of fame just by "taking out" a cop, shooting up a rival gangbanger or targetting some pregnant woman in carjacking. If you were a kid today, who would your heroes be?

There is a better way to cover crime stories. If violence is of such great interest, why not put it into some kind of context?

Don't just show us the chalk drawings of the body in the street... give us something we can do besides tighten the iron bars on our windows.

Don't just show us the chalk drawing of the body in the street. Give us some insight about why two street gangs are willing to go to war for the sake of a few blocks of turf. Show us how a typical police investigation works. Walk us through the criminal justice process. Bring us in on a crime victims' support group.

Or better yet, give us something we can do besides tighten the iron bars on our windows. Profile that underfunded group trying to keep kids out of gangs or the anti-truancy program that's been rounding up the ones playing hookey. Such programs are always starving for money—and volunteers. Give us a story about the correlation between illiteracy and a life of crime. Then show us a literacy program that works.

Television is a wonderful and powerful medium. It can tell a story with little else but pictures. But use those pictures to tell the rest of the story—don't just focus on the blood on the boulevard. Television news programs have a responsibility to inform the community without airing a montage of gore.

I'm not advocating goody-two-shoes news here. But if you're going to make money from the tragedies in our communitites, then take some responsibility for the life of our communities. Or else there might not be much of a community left when the TV lights are turned off.

Kitty Felde is special correspondant for public radio station KCRW in Santa Monica, California.

How Reporters Can Make A Difference

According to Matthew Case, a reporter and volunteer mediator, the news media's coverage of conflict oftne contradicts one of journalism's main tenets: "Report the news, don't make it."

He cites studies which show that "more than 50 percent of news stories involve conflict and emphasize competition over cooperation, negative over positive and aggression over non-aggression...[which] often exacerbate the conflicts media reports." To help journalist remove this impact, he has developed six guidelines based on conflict management strategies that reporters can use to help them report conflict responsibly:

- Don't wait for a conflict to reach the crisis stage to report it.
- Report both cooperative and competitive behaviors.
- Include all parties who may be affected or could affect a solution.
- Uncover compatible and incompatible interests: psychological, procedural and substantive.
- Clarify issues, perceived and real.
- Question the process.

Matthew Case, The News & Observer, *505 W. Franklin St., Chapel Hill, NC, 27514.*

WHAT'S WRONG WITH THE RATINGS?

By Barbara J. Wilson, Ph.D

"I saw plenty of media violence when I was a child and it didn't hurt me."

"Everyone knows it's just entertainment."

"It's only a cartoon, everyone knows it's not real."

"As long as I go to the movies with my kids, it's OK."

If you follow the public debates over media violence, you may be familiar with arguments like these. Made by adults from an adult perspective, they dismiss and discredit the problem of media violence for children. But I suspect few of these complacent critics understand how a child really sees the violence in a movie like *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* or a video game such as *Sonic the Hedgehog*. Most adults find it difficult to remember their childhood reactions to media. Fewer still can analyze them.

This lack of understanding becomes a huge problem in crafting—or even evaluating—ratings systems designed to protect children from the effects of violence on movies and, increasingly, on television. In fact, analysis of the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) film ratings system—the familiar G, PG, PG-13, R and N-17—that appear in ads and movie reviews—demonstrates that it is based on several faulty assumptions about children's responses to violence in media.

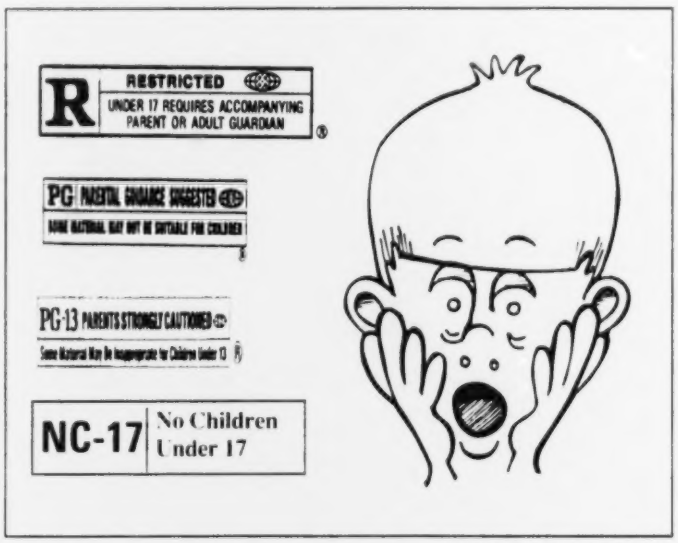


ILLUSTRATION BY JOHN SANTOS

How Does A Film Get a Rating?

As a system of self regulation by the motion picture industry, the MPAA rating program was designed to reflect parental reactions. Jack Valenti, MPAA president, has noted that the MPAA is concerned with finding out what "most American parents will think about film content."

The ratings are established by a board of seven Los Angeles area parents—real mothers and fathers—whose fulltime paid job is to review films. Its membership is not intentionally selected to include educators, childhood development experts or others with special training in the effects of media on children.

Films are submitted voluntarily by studios and producers that pay a fee for the service. Unsubmitted films—usually international productions and some independent efforts—are usually reviewed and advertised as unrated and may be harder to market. The MPAA Ratings Board examines each individual film in terms of theme, language, nudity, sex, drug use and violence. Informing parents *is* important to the MPAA. But it is also clear that the ratings system's main purpose is defusing public criticism and protecting the film industry from government intervention.

Unfortunately, the MPAA's preoccupation with what is offensive to adults comes at the expense of what is arguably a more important question: What types of portrayals are really harmful to children?

In light of social science research on the effects of media portrayals on young viewers there are several problems with the current MPAA rating categories:

• *Age division.* The MPAA rating system divides viewers into three broad age ranges: 0-13 years, 13-17 years and over 17. Such a broad classification ignores the critical changes in learning and evaluation that occur during the preteen years. Currently, movies that are rated as G or PG are deemed appropriate for *any* child under 13, without recognizing that a five-year-old, for example, is likely to respond quite differently than a 12-year-old to a violent or sexual portrayal.

• *Older vs. younger.* Current rating categories also assume that all films are more problematic for *younger* than for *older* children. For instance, the PG-13 rating indicates that some films may be seen by older children but should not be seen by those under 13. Yet research indicates that certain media depictions, such as teenage characters who engage in realistic aggression, are likely to be *more* problematic for an older child. Preteen viewers who are typically interested in motives and searching for role models might be more inclined to imitate the behaviors seen than a younger child who doesn't yet grasp the complexity of how motivation affects action.

• *Context of violence.* The rating scheme focuses primarily on the *amount* of violence and its explicitness, while ignoring how the violence is portrayed. The context of the violence, such as the nature of the

perpetrator and whether the violence is justified (i.e. self defense), are important determinants of the impact of media violence.

Moreover, many of these features will affect children differently depending upon their individual level of cognitive development, that is, their ability to reason, to recognize consequences and to separate reality from fantasy. These distinctions are hardly simple; in fact they are quite complex and vary widely from child to child. But they must be considered when labeling films or television programs. An extensive review of social science research on children's response to media portrayals undertaken by myself and my colleagues at the University of California/Santa Barbara in 1990 provides a number of clues.

Characters who receive money, popularity or praise for violent acts can encourage aggressive attitudes and imitative behavior.

Children Are Different

Do children react to media violence? The answer to this question is more complex than a simple yes or no. It depends upon the emotional maturity and the level of learning ability of each child. Most parents of two or more children know how much children's abilities and understanding can vary even at the same age, and a year or two of development creates broad differences.

Certainly any parent who has taken two young children to even a mildly scary movie like *Snow White* or *The Wizard of Oz* has observed very different reactions. A six-year-old may be enthralled, while a three-year-old hides under the seat. A 13-year-old may be fascinated by the tension and special effects of *Jurassic Park*, while its portrayal of realistic and merciless dinosaurs would terrify a younger sister or brother.

Recent research on child development has provided us with a much greater understanding of the progressive changes in children's cognitive abilities that occur during the preteen years. Most studies find that preschoolers and children in the early grades differ from older elementary school children not only in what they know but in how they think about the world. For our purposes, then, we should classify children into two broad categories according to cognitive development: younger children, roughly ages three to seven, and older children, ages eight to 12.

Some of the differences between the two groups apply directly to the effects of violence portrayals. The following points should be kept in mind:

• *Younger children are more dependent on appearances than older children.* Their thoughts are tied closely to surface features of a character or object such as how it looks or sounds. *E.T.*'s physical appearance frightened some younger kids.

• *Older children are able to consider more conceptual aspects of the same character.* While a younger child is likely to focus primarily on a character's physical appearance or actions (Roadrunner has a long tail and goes Beep-beep), an older child is able to move beyond appearances and consider the character's motives and words (Roadrunner escapes while Wile E. Coyote falls off the cliff).

• *Older children can distinguish reality from fantasy.* A young child is apt to attribute life and realism to any character who looks real. Consequently, Ninja Turtles, Big Bird and many other animal figures, whether animated or not, are perceived as real so long as they *appear to act like humans.* As they mature, children gradually develop the ability to compare media depictions to real life. First they attribute realism to anything that is *possible* in real life. Later they attribute realism only to those depictions that are *probable* based on their own experience.

• *Older children are better at drawing inferences.* The ability to form opinions and draw conclusions from data is essential to the understanding of media portrayals. Research suggests that younger children are less able than older children to integrate pieces of information together from stories and narrations, and then to draw inferences from the information. Consequently, linking different scenes together to make sense of the plot can be particularly difficult for younger children, especially if the scenes are not in close proximity or are out of chronological order.

Context of Violence

Many people complain about the amount of violence on television and in the movies. Perhaps more important than the sheer volume of violent actions, though, is the way in which even a small amount of violence is portrayed. The context of violence is a critical determinant of whether a particular portrayal will have a harmful effect. Contextual features help to explain why a movie like *Rambo: First Blood II* is more objectionable than a movie about the Holocaust, even though both may contain explicit depictions of violence. Research has identified four aspects of the context in which media violence appears. Each takes on special importance when considering the developmental level of the child viewer.

• *Reward and punishment.* Portrayals in which violent characters benefit from their actions are most likely to produce harmful effects on child viewers. Characters who receive money, popularity or praise for violent acts can encourage aggressive attitudes and imitative behavior in child viewers. Characters need not be explicitly rewarded for such effects to occur. As long as there is no punishment associated with a violent act, young viewers have been shown to imitate such depictions. Unfortunately, much of dramatized violence on TV and in movies is conveyed without negative consequences; neither perpetrators nor victims suffer much and the perpetrator is often rewarded for antisocial behavior.

The MPAA's preoccupation with what is offensive to adults comes at the expense of [an] arguably... more important question: what types of portrayals are really harmful to children?

Although both younger and older children are influenced by the reward and punishment of violent characters, children at different stages of development will respond differently to the timing of these elements of the plot. In many scenarios, a character receives rewards immediately after performing an aggressive act. For example, the Joker in *Batman* evades the authorities throughout the movie and even

gains the attention of a pretty woman. Only in the end is he captured and punished. As mentioned, younger children are less able to link scenes together and draw inferences from them. Thus, for movies in which rewards are immediate and punishment is delayed, younger children are more likely to see the violence as sanctioned and thus acceptable.

•*Reality of violence.* Another important feature is the degree of realism associated with a violent portrayal. Research indicates that naturalistic violence is more likely to be imitated and used as a guide for behavior. However, in this case the influence of realism is more critical for *older*, not younger, children. Because older children are better able to distinguish reality from fantasy, they will be affected more by movies, such as the *Karate Kid* and *Rocky*, that feature violent acts that are humanly possible. In contrast, younger children respond to both fantasy and realism, making cartoons that contain animated violent characters, like *The Transformers: The Movie*, just as problematic for them as more realistic depictions.

• *Justified violence.* A third aspect that influences the reaction to violence is the degree to which it is presented as justified or defensible in a given situation. Violent actions that are seen as an appropriate response by the characters performing them are more likely to be imitated by all ages.

A common theme in many programs is the hero who is forced to be violent because his job demands it or because he must retaliate against an enemy. The popular turtle heroes in *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* are a good example. Their message may be ultimately pro-social but the point is conveyed through script twists that make the violence appear justified. Research suggests that both younger and older children can be confused by such mixed signals. However, because of their perceptual limitations, younger children are particularly susceptible.

• *Perception of the character.* A fourth contextual cue concerns the nature of the character who acts aggressively. Children are more likely to watch closely and imitate characters who are similar to themselves. Thus, violent movies that feature young perpetrators are more problematic than programs involving violent adults. In addition, the particular age of the perpetrator is important. Younger children are more likely to be attracted to child actors like Macaulay Culkin in *Home Alone 2*. Older children will be more strongly influenced by preteen and teen characters such as those in the PG-rated *Free Willy* and such R-rated films as *Colors* or *Boyz 'n the Hood* that they may see on video or cable.

How Ratings Can Work Better

According to this analysis, an effective ratings category structure should examine movies and films in the light of these four context areas. Ratings categories also need to determine the age groups to be affected. In general, I recommend at least two categories, roughly three to seven and eight to twelve. A separate category for adolescents would recognize both their more fully developed sensibilities and their likelihood of identifying with and modeling the actions of teenage or young adult characters. An effective system would also have to take special note of the impact of violence, horror and sexuality on young viewers.

The subtleties of these developmental differences and their complex interaction with media make the current five-category MPAA ratings system highly questionable. They also make the task of ratings reform far from easy. But I do not believe they make it impossible.

Above all else, those of us who are struggling to reform ratings or find other remedies to the problem of media violence must consider the varying capacities of children. We must recognize that all children are different. We must also remember that younger children perceive the world differently than older children, who in turn think differently than adults. Losing sight of this important principle is to lose sight of those we are trying to protect.

Barbara J. Wilson, Ph.D., is an associate professor in the Department of Communication, University of California/Santa Barbara.

What Other Countries Do About Ratings

By Joel Federman

Concerns about media violence shared around the world have spurred regulatory efforts in many other countries.

According to a recent Mediascope study (*Film and Television Ratings: An International Assessment*, released Summer 1993), comparing ratings systems in 36 countries and provinces, there has been more action taken elsewhere to curb the effects of media violence than in the United States. For example, the British Board of Film Classification has required that many violent scenes be cut from the American versions of such popular films as *Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves*, *Lethal Weapon 3*, and *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*, to avoid restrictive classifications. In contrast, restrictions on viewing of sexual content are often less of a preoccupation, especially in European countries.

In general, the most successful ratings systems pay attention to developmental age differences between younger and older children, and they provide detailed content descriptions as well as restrictions on viewing and advisory ratings categories. Some countries also address television programming as well as films.

Some examples are interesting:

• The rating systems in several other countries also take into account the kinds of violent material that might frighten or influence children of younger ages. Denmark, Germany, Norway, Spain and Sweden all have ratings classifications that either warn parents about violent material or restrict theater access to children under the ages of five to seven.

• Australia and New Zealand provide a complete ratings system for television that classifies television programming according to its levels of violence, sexuality, profanity and adult themes. Programs with more restrictive classifications are only allowed to be shown at hours of the day when children are less likely to see them.

• Sweden restricts distribution of films which "depict sexual violence or coercion" or graphic violence toward people or animals. Violators are subject to fines or imprisonment. While a Swedish-style ban might not be palatable or desirable in the United States, the polices and practices of other countries may help guide us if we choose to reform the ratings system in the United States.

Joel Federman is director of research of Mediascope, a Los Angeles-based advocacy organization working to improve the depiction of health and social issues in entertainment.

20 WAYS TO CREATE A CARING CULTURE

By Jay Dover

Stories of violence are familiar to anyone with a television in America today. Whether flashed on the nightly news, dramatized in a sensational movie of the week or packed into "action" blockbuster films (a guy, a gun and an attitude!), not a day goes by that we don't get a dose of aggression from the media. And it's getting worse.

Recent cover articles in *Time* and *Newsweek* have detailed the rising wave of violence holding society hostage in a culture of conflict and fear. Especially alarming is the news of the increase in crime committed by children—often with guns. Watching these seemingly endless reports of real-life brutality in tandem with the barrage of fictional violence euphemised as "action" in films and on television, we have to ask: why in the world are we killing each other?

Indeed, this is a crossroad in our cultural and social history. Do we remain victimized by a violent media culture, or do we work to create a peaceful society where we feel safe in our homes, on our streets and in our communities?

What kind of culture do we want our children to grow up in?

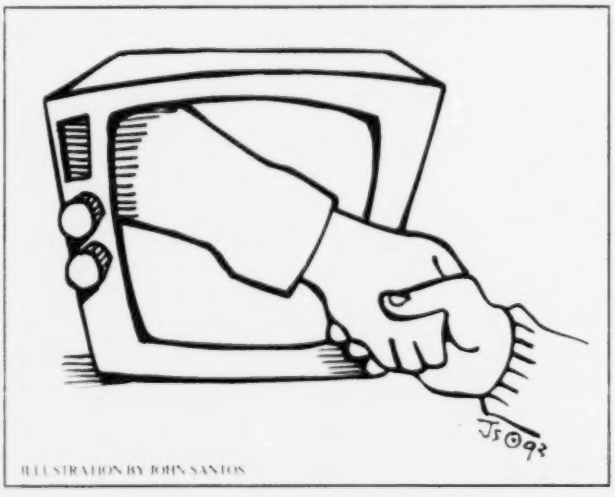


ILLUSTRATION BY JOHN SANTOS

It's Up to Us

Without a doubt, decades of media violence have made art of deadly aggression and helped erode our sense of peace and security. But it no longer has to be that way. Most of us prefer a "people safe" world—a society that nurtures individual growth, fosters healthy relationships and respects the diversity of cultures worldwide. It's what we're constantly striving for. We're continually pursuing solutions to difficult problems that will improve our quality of life. Take, for instance, the environmental movement.

Reports of a depleting ozone layer, diminishing rain forest, devastating oil spills and other environmental disasters set off an alarm: We are destroying our planet. Faced with a future of living in a toxic world, we realized we had to save the earth to save ourselves.

Today, we recycle our cans, bottles and newspapers. We conserve water. Chlorofluorocarbons are banned. Industries must adhere to strict pollution controls. We celebrate an annual "Earth Day" to re-affirm our global commitment to preserving our planet's natural resources.

This same vision and energy is needed to transform our culture of violence into a culture of caring. We must make the commitment to ourselves and to our children to make our world less violent than the day before. We have to. For, like our still-endangered blue planet, no less than the future of our children is at stake.

A Positive Approach

On July 15, 1993 the Center for Media and Values, with funding and participation from Mediascope, a Los Angeles-based nonprofit advocacy organization working to improve the depiction of health and social issues in entertainment, held a small, informal consultation on Challenging our Culture of Violence. The idea of the consultation was to brainstorm new directions for framing solutions to the media violence crisis.

In addition to CMV and Mediascope staff, a number of local Los Angeles educators and community leaders were invited to share their expertise. Participants included Ann Desmond, vice president for communications of the California PTA; Keiko Hentell, principal of Burbank High School; Rev. Alvin Hawkins, board chair, United Methodist Jr. Basketball League & Youth Development Project; Casandra Hawkings, Teacher Training Magnet, Los Angeles Unified School District and "Teacher of the Year;" Frederica Burrows, retired elementary educator, Glendale public schools; Barbara Wilson, associate professor of communications at the University of California/Santa Barbara; and Phyllis Steinberg, School Mediation Services, Los Angeles County Bar Association. The event was facilitated by Professor Ian Mitroff, director of the Center for Crisis Management at the University of Southern California .

The participants concentrated on generating ideas and tried to avoid being discouraged by the complexity of the issue. The result of the open forum was an impressive list of media-based proposals for reducing media violence.

Granted, some of these are broad-stroke solutions to a problem that has far-reaching causes and effects. But that's the point. Collectively, they symbolize a movement toward nonviolence. A step in a positive and healthy direction. A profound commit-

SEARCHING FOR SOLUTIONS

ment toward creating a "people safe" world.

More importantly, many of the group's proposals are family-oriented and community-based. Too often, finding solutions to media violence is dumped on members of Congress, network TV executives or engineers working on V-Chips and lock boxes. But we all must share in this national task.

Consultation participants discovered that there's a lot each of us can do right now to lessen the impact of media violence in our personal and family lives. It's far easier to work with your local television station and newspaper, for example, than a national network or publication. Local efforts avoid debilitating bureauracracy and encourage immediate action where it's needed most: in our homes and our neighborhoods. And eventually, those small actions add up to influence national policies and change national priorities.

The following 20 proposals expanded from the best of the consultation's list of ideas represent an unrestricted, solution-minded, community-based approach to the problem of media violence. At their core is the quest for a non-violent society. They're also an invitation to you to join communities everywhere in transforming our culture of violence into a culture of caring.

Finding a solution to the violence epidemic will take time and effort. However, doing nothing will guarantee the status quo of mayhem on the street and on the screen. With so much at stake, we can no longer afford to sit in our LazyBoys and watch a murderous world go by.

Jay Dover is assistant editor of Media&Values *magazine.*

WHAT WE CAN DO

1 Nonviolent Computer Game

Using CD-ROM technology, a computer game along the lines of *Carmen Sandiego* would challenge players to solve conflicts nonviolently. Anger management and conflict resolution skills could be employed as modes of action. The game would be equally effective as entertainment in the home and an educational tool in schools. Design and format could be developed for different age groups.

What You Can Do: *Parents and teachers can help kids design a game and submit it to a computer software company or a computer programmer.*

2 MTV "Rock The Violence"

Similar to the "Rock the Vote" campaign that encouraged young adults to take an active role in the democratic process through voting, such a campaign would encourage and promote nonviolent behavior through PSAs from celebrities, rock stars and musicians with whom the MTV crowd can identify. In fact, MTV aired a 15-second animated spot recently called "Silence the Violence" in which marching machine guns turned into flowers. This is a good start for a larger program.

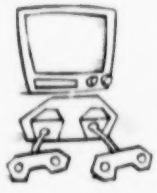
What You Can Do: *Work with local cable access channels and radio stations to get a pilot program started. Call MTV in New York (212)258-8000.*

3 Nonviolent Student of the Month

Due to the rise of violence in elementary and secondary schools, a highly-visible media campaign highlighting nonviolent students would help disarm the fear and suspicion that schools are dangerous places. Students who solve conflicts nonviolently or deter others from using violence would be awarded special recognition by the school and community. Promotion would include extensive television and newspaper coverage. Local TV stations might sponsor the program.

What You Can Do: *Begin at home by rewarding your own children. Contact the PTA about developing such a program or supporting one already in place.*

4 Nonviolent Line of Video Games



Already under criticism for the graphic violence in *Mortal Kombat*, which features bloody decapitations and dismemberment, Nintendo (as well as Sega and Genesis) could develop a line of video games whose characters score points through nonviolent action. Competition would be based on creative thinking, innovative problem-solving.

What You Can Do: *"Reinvent" a violent video game with your kids as they play—propose "peaceful" characters and action. Write to Nintendo, Sega or Genesis with a new game idea.*

5 Nonviolent Video Projects for Kids

A series of film-industry-sponsored video projects in which children explore alternatives to violence in film and television. Kids would film a scene of conflict and with the assistance of a screenwriter, director or producer, find ways to film the scene without violence. Techniques and methods of filmmaking would allow kids to get beneath the surface of media violence—how it is used and why—by promoting a contextual understanding of its purpose in the scene.

What You Can Do: *Initiate a program at your local TV station or cable access channel. Organize projects for afterschool programs.*

6 Ethics Training in Film Schools

Most people preparing for public service professions like law enforcement or medicine are required to take ethics courses during their training. Because television and film are considerable forces in defining American culture, a similar requirement should be made of film and television students. Classes would focus on the role of the filmmaker as a participant in a democratic society, the political and social implications of the film as well as the potential moral and ethical imprint of media on different types of audiences.

What You Can Do: *Work with local television stations to develop and implement a community-based public service communcations code.*

7 Video Comparing Real Violence to Media Violence

An educational video similar to *Scared Straight*, a film study of prison life, could demonstrate the differences between real and media violence. Primarily shown in schools, the video could also be part of an educational awareness program facilitated by film and television professionals (perhaps stuntmen or news reporters). It might compare the depiction of violence in film and TV to real violence with particular attention to the consequences of aggression.

What You Can Do: *Point out the difference between "real" and "fake" while watching "action" shows with children.*

8 A School Play Promoting Nonviolence

A theatrical play or a performance art piece demonstrating and advocating nonviolent solutions could be performed in a school district as part of an educational program on violence. Written, produced, acted and staged by a multicultural cast of students, the play would emphasize anger management, conflict resolution skills and promote understanding between ethnic groups. The production could travel from school to school and also be tailored to fit a particular school's "personality."

What You Can Do: *Volunteer to help produce the play. Work with a local high school drama teacher or young people to write the play.*

9 A Slogan to Crystalize a Movement to Nonviolence

"Buckle Up. It's the Law" and "A Mind is a Terrible Thing to Waste" both capture their respective causes well. So much so that they're part of our cultural lexicon. A similar slogan to bolster the nonviolence movement could crystalize the public in a massive joint effort to reduce violence. Perhaps a campaign to find a slogan could start in schools and business. PSAs, bumper stickers, T-shirts and similar promotional material would help disseminate the slogan.

What You Can Do: *Brainstorm slogan ideas with your family, community group and church. Contact local radio talk show or TV station to promote your slogan.*

10 Kids' Advisory Panel to Media

Most major organizations and businesses have a board of directors that helps guide the organization. Similarly, a "board of directors" paneled by kids would serve as creative consultants to advise various media. A board could be established in local schools and community groups and sponsored by a local television station. It would primarily function as a way to get children involved in the business of media.

What You Can Do: *Form your own "family" kids' panel at home. "Board members" would decide on program selections, viewing hours and video rentals following agreed upon guidelines.*

11 Nonviolent Promotional Advertising on Products

Stories of individuals who have used nonviolence to solve difficult problems could be promoted on products with high exposure to children, i.e., milk cartons, cereal boxes, trading cards and school lunch trays. Besides the traditional histories of Martin Luther King Jr. and Gandhi, stories should feature local heroes and community leaders that kids could identify with easily.

What You Can Do: *Teachers might organize a classroom writing project to research a collection of stories. A parent group could help find ways to publish the stories.*

12 TV Show in Which Character Roles are Switched

Action and drama shows often feature only one point of view, usually that of a "good guy" who overcomes obstacles to defeat a

Grassroots Effort Challenges Violence

In the summer of 1991 Minnesota was experiencing an outbreak in violent crimes. The cases, which included the highly publicized kidnappings, rapes and murders of Carin Streufert and Melissa Johnson had many Minnesotans grappling with the situation. Amid the familiar public outcry for tougher criminal penalties, civilian crime prevention specialists Sheila Miller and Molly Koivumaki were sitting at lunch discussing the cases and the futility of prison sentences or the death penalty *after* the crime had been committed.

turn off the Violence

Koivumaki turned to Miller and said, "If we could just turn off the violence. If we just had a knob. If we could even just get people to turn off violent entertainment. Wouldn't that be something?"

As a result of the discussion, Turn Off the Violence, a grass-roots Minneapolis-based coalition of business, religious, law-enforcement and community organizations was created.

"We started calling a lot of special service organizations. We called folks that were new in the community...They decided this was a good idea and said 'Let's do it.'" Miller said, adding that they got the effort off the ground despite financial constraints.

"We didn't have the budget to do fancy printing for all the publicity materials, so we did it all on our personal computers, and photocopied them."

The coalition seeks to educate people about the consequences of long-term exposure to entertainment that makes violence seem ordinary. It also stresses nonviolent means of resolving conflicts. Turn Off the Violence produces guides for educators, organizers and the family.

Turn Off the Violence, P.O. Box 27558, Minneapolis, MN 55427, (612) 593-8041.

"bad guy." This technique creates a false sense of needing to create an enemy that justifies the use of violence. A show that switches protagonist and antagonist roles and highlights different perspectives could promote and urge viewers to understand all sides of an issue before resorting to violence. "Humanizing" the enemy is a valuable way to open the lines of communication between conflicting parties.

What You Can Do: *Have a youth group or after school kids club rewrite and replay an "action" show with different members assuming different roles.*

13 Major Advertiser Endorsement

Leading media advertisers such as Coke, Pepsi, McDonalds and Nike could develop a series of PSAs endorsing nonviolent television shows, products and programs. They could also promote awareness of nonviolent solutions by sponsoring or endorsing educational projects in schools. A commercial slot such as during the Super Bowl would help get the promotion in high gear. Local corporations could use full- page pullouts in newspapers supporting peaceful solutions to community conflicts.

What You Can Do: *Lead a postcard drive to enlist a local company to get the idea started (see pages 23-24).*

14 Red Ribbon Week in School

Similiar to the awareness created by the red AIDS ribbon, a colorful ribbon would represent a commitment to make the schools and the community less violent and a positive learning environment. Week-long projects and events would involve students and teachers in nonviolent activities that raise nonviolence awareness. The ribbon would eventually be profiled by highly-visible celebrities too.

What You Can Do: *Make, design and wear the ribbon.*

15 A Violence "Tax"

Modeled after the idea of "sin" taxes, film companies, cable channels and television networks who use violence as a means of promoting and selling their products would be subject to a violence tax. Since paying taxes isn't a pleasant idea for most people, film producers and writers would give considerable thought before using violence as a means of storytelling or creating action. Especially accountable to this tax would be producers of slasher and horror films which often feature numerous scenes of gratuitious violence.

What You Can Do: *Decrease allowances to children who use them to rent* Nightmare on Elm Street, Hellraiser *or similar slasher films.*

16 Peace Week on TV

Cable channels and television networks would schedule programming featuring positive, pro-social and nonviolent content. Movies would be aired only if they contain limited scenes of violence whose context was fully explained. Sitcoms, dramas and soap operas could develop special episodes featuring nonviolent solutions to conflicts. Local and national news would make an effort to limit reporting of "negative" stories.

What You Can Do: *Schedule a week-long family viewing of only nonviolent programs. PTA or church groups can develop and publicize a list of recommended nonviolent videos and TV shows as well as work with local TV stations on the idea.*

17 Anti-Violence Fair/Convention

A major community event where national corporations, local businesses, film studios, cable channels, television networks, gather to explore new developments and the latest programs dedicated to the reduction of violence in media and society. Seminars, demonstrations, informational material could be disseminated. High visibility of the event in the media would increase the impact of the programs. Corporations could sponsor school field trips to the fair/convention.

What You Can Do: *Organize a block or street party centered around nonviolent activities. Teachers can conduct in-classroom nonviolence "seminars."*

18 TV Series/Videos with Stories of Non Violent Heroes

Modeled after the Arts&Entertainment Channel's *Biography* series, this program would highlight a nonviolent historical figure or personality whose use of nonviolence serves to inspire others. Besides detailing an individual's nonviolent action, the program would also show the local and global benefits of nonviolent behavior. A localized show could feature community members who have used alternatives to violence to resolve conflicts within their own community.

What You Can Do: *Have children interview neighbors or family members about heroic actions they have performed or witnessed. Produce with a video camera.*

19 Family to Family Media Event

A high-profile media event where families join in group activities to establish community coalitions and de-program ethnic stereotyping. Such an event would foster communication between ethnic groups that have often been portrayed in the media as antagonistic. Activities would encourage participation and teamwork within a non-hierarchic, non-exclusive framework. The media would participate in either sponsorship or providing extensive media coverage.

What You Can Do: *Encourage PTAs or community groups to organize a program. Host a "salon" to discuss with neighbors a particular media issue.*

20 Cabinet Secretary Post

This presidential appointee would be responsible for coordinating the solutions to violence in the U.S. Working with media industry professionals, health organizations, law enforcement agencies, educational groups as well as parents and concerned citizens, the appointee would help organize the vast resources and programs dedicated to nonviolence.

What You Can Do: *Appoint a family member as the Minister of Nonviolence.*

Super Bowl Commercial Raises Awareness of Violence Against Women

By John M. Gonzales

Just before NBC's Super Bowl XXVII coverage in January, 1993, viewers saw a 30-second commercial that was out of sync with regular Super Sunday fare of computerized beer bottles playing football and sports cars racing down country roads.

It showed an anxious man behind bars proclaiming "I didn't know you'd go to jail for hitting your wife." A voiceover followed telling women where to call for help if they had been battered.

This apparition among the car and beer commercials was a public service announcement that came out of the efforts of Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting (FAIR) and a coalition of domestic violence groups. The PSA, according to Linda Mitchell, board member of FAIR in Los Angeles, "was made to bring attention" to what she called "a lack of media coverage on the issue of domestic violence against women."

It was also aired, Mitchell said, in light of police statistics and the assertions of "some shelters that actually documented an increase in domestic violence during football broadcasts."

But when the domestic violence story was picked up by newspapers and TV stations across the country, possible inadequacies of media coverage were not focused on, nor were police statistics or testimonies of the shelters.

Instead media focus fell upon an Old Dominion College study that found some evidence of a correlation between sports and a rise in domestic violence.

Though researchers of the study never offered a percentage to illustrate the rise of domestic violence during sports broadcasts, word got out that the study found a 40 percent increase in domestic violence during the Super Bowl.

ABC, CBS, the *New York Times*, *The San Francisco Examiner*, and the *Daily News* in Los Angeles all reported on domestic violence using the Super Bowl angle, some including the 40 percent figure. "Many women's shelters report as much as a 40 percent increase in calls for help" the *Daily News* read.

"We had more calls after the Super Bowl than we have had for years."

Rita Smith, National Coalition of Violence Against Women

With continued reports on the issue, the questionable percentage was investigated by Ken Ringle of *The Washington Post*.

Ringle found no percentage to exist and in an ensuing story, claimed that a speaker at a press conference co-hosted by FAIR had misrepresented the study by using the 40-percent figure. Stories in *The Wall Street Journal* and the *Boston Globe* focused primarily on the now dubious percentage. So why was there such a media backlash against the efforts of FAIR?

The answers depend on whom you ask.

Ringle maintains that he had no agenda and only investigated the football correlation because the *Post* had run articles for years about a drop in crime after Redskins games.

"I was concerned that either our stories were wrong or that we had missed a story."

Mitchell, however, suggests that Ringle and others saw an opportunity to embarrass the watchdog FAIR. "FAIR has established a reputation of being very critical of the mainstream media and this was a chance to bash the bashers," Mitchell said.

As for the infamous 40 percent, it seems to have originated at a news conference co-hosted by FAIR just before the Super Bowl. There, a speaker expressed the results of the Old Dominion study with a percentage. Though the authors of the study chose not to use the percentage, they maintained that they "have not accused anyone of distorting the results of the study."

According to Rita Smith, program coordinator of the National Coalition of Violence Against Women, perhaps one of the few benefits of the media melee is that it raised awareness of the domestic violence issue. "We had more calls after the Super Bowl than we have had for years," she said.

John M. Gonzales is a free-lance writer and editorial assistant for Media&Values. *He is a political science student at the University of Southern California.*

Order More Copies of This Two-Part Series on Violence

Order additional copies of *Media and Violence Part Two: Searching for Solutions* to share with others or to use with classes, workshops or seminars. Copies of *Media and Violence Part One: Making the Connections* are also available. Prices are just $5 each with a 20% discount for 5-50 copies and 40% dicount for 51 or more. Add $3 postage for up to four copies; call (310)559-2944 for shipping charges on larger quantities. Visa/MC accepted.

Order from: Center for Media and Values, 1962 S. Shenandoah, Los Angeles, CA 90034; phone: (310) 559-2944; FAX: (310) 559-9396.

Organizations Working to Create a Nonviolent Media Culture

ILLUSTRATION BY JOHN SANTOS

Throughout North America, individual and community groups are beginning to recognize and react to the violence/media connection. Activities of several groups provide diverse examples of citizen action on the local level.

Child-friendly materials, local media publicity and corporate involvement all combine to energize the peace-building efforts of **Heartsprings**, a Tucson, Arizona-based nonprofit organization dedicated to helping children learn nonviolent interpersonal and community skills. The "I Help Build Peace" (grades K-5) program features a cartoon booklet with stories and pictures to help children learn peace-making behaviors like praising others, avoiding put-downs and noticing when they have hurt others.

Started by Dennis Embry, Ph.D., a local child psychologist, the program focuses on activities such as a peace-oriented chart where children earn points for a prize (like a pizza from Pizza Hut) and activities that can be done on a classroom scale. A related program based in Bryan, Texas, has become a joint project with KBTX, a local CBS affiliate. In Tucson, the *Arizona Star* has become a media cosponsor of the Heartsprings program and kept parents involved as well. Beginning next year, the "Path of the Warrior: Increase the Peace" program for middle schools will start in 150 middle schools in Arizona, Texas and California. Individual booklets for both projects are available for $2.95 plus 55 cents for postage and handling. Heartsprings, Inc., P.O. Box 12158, Tucson, AZ 85732, (602)322-9977, Fax: (602) 299-6682.

Americans for Responsible Media (ARM), a Chicago media watchdog organization, was created by two businessmen who were critical of local TV coverage of the riots that followed the Chicago Bulls' victory in the June 1992 National Basketball Association championship. ARM has filed petitions with the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to request that the broadcast licenses of WBBM-TV and WMAQ-TV not be renewed because, they charge, the stations aired "negligent and harmful communications which encouraged and assisted looters." ARM plans similar action against some Los Angeles stations for their coverage of the Los Angeles riots in April, 1992. According to the Chicago *Sun-Times* in June 1993, these Chicago stations showed more restraint during coverage of street crowds when the Bulls repeated their NBA championship series win year than last year. ARM, 600 W. Rand Rd., Arlington Heights, IL 60004, (708)255-2735, FAX: (708)632-0616.

TAKE 2, a project of the **Children's Media Lab** in Berkeley, California, uses an interactive television program, kid-produced videos and a computer-based communication network as the base for a multimedia problem-solving project for 10 to 15-year-olds. Each TAKE 2 program explores a different social topic using the same five-step, problem-solving approach. Kids can submit their own clips, ideas, graphics and responses to the show through their teachers or the computer network. The pilot program covered dropping out of school, but later topics will include gang and ethnic violence, teen-pregnancy, drugs and smoking, AIDS and the environment. Children's Media Lab, 1442A Walnut St., Ste. 476, Berkeley, CA 94709-0237, (510) 223-6528.

Stand Against Violence Everywhere (SAVE) promotes the concept of "Violence-Free Zones," such as seen on our cover. SAVE produces a "Violence-Free Zone" sign and a pledge that can be put up at home, in school or at work. The pledge says, "In this space: 1) There will be no violence against persons... 2) There will be a voice for reform of any [group] whose rules or practice do violence... 3) There will be a voice for peace among nations. 4) There will be respect and love for our planet and all its creatures. 5) We will speak out against the use and glorification of violence in our media and in our culture. 6) There will be protection for victims of violence. 7) There will be a commitment to nonviolent resolutions of conflict. Teachers, parents and other individuals are encouraged to produce their own version of the "Violence Free Zone." SAVE 590 E. Lockwood Ave, St. Louis, MO 63119-3279, (314) 962-8112.

Canadians Concerned About Violence in Entertainment (CCAVE), a Toronto, Ontario-based educational resource center, was founded in 1983 in response to growing concerns about high levels of entertainment violence. CCAVE collects current information about violence in entertainment such as research findings, Canadian TV violence regulations and obscenity law, statistics on crime and violence on commercial networks as well as ways to develop critical skills to improve the quality of television viewing. CCAVE makes this information available to the media and the public by publishing a newsletter, holding conferences, workshops and public meetings, publication of brochures for libraries or doctor's offices and the production, sale and rental of audio-visual educational material and cooperative, nonviolent games. CCAVE c/o 167 Glen Road, Toronto, ON M4W 2W8, (416) 961-0853.

IMAGINE...
A Media of Meaning

By Elizabeth Thoman
Executive Director

At the beginning of the 20th Century, about the time the movies were invented, our visions of the future were transformed from utopian dreams into urban nightmares.

Many factors were at work. But it's likely that the new visual media played an important role in this shift. Film and later television producers found it easier to visualize a world of surrealistic decay than to laboriously shape entertainment that, as Gloria DeGaetano, publisher of the Redmond, Washington-based newsletter *Media MessAge* puts it, "shows people negotiating conflict and resolving it through communication, understanding and empathy."

It's time we all put our imaginations to work again.

The challenge of creating a world of peace and opportunity for all involves a massive struggle for educational opportunity, ethnic understanding and alternatives to aggression. It won't happen overnight. But we must begin.

As media viewers, readers and listeners, we cannot ignore either the media's part in creating the ideas that shape us or our responsibility for demanding the kind of media we need. Media creators must also face up to their own responsibility for molding our hopes and dreams, a responsibility inherent in the right of self-expression and freedom of speech.

Our goal—as teachers and parents, artists and patrons, citizens and lawmakers—should be to demand and work for a culture in which "blood and gore, horror and the basest of human instincts are not the driving storyline of prime-time entertainment and talk shows," DeGaetano continues.

That's why the work of the Center for Media and Values is so important. Publication of "Media and Violence: Searching for Solutions" and its predecessor issue, "Making the Connections," is only the beginning. Even our planned Media Literacy Workshop Kit™, *Beyond Blame: Countering Violence in the Media* (due out in early 1994) is just the latest in a continuing stream of teaching resources for schools, churches and community groups.

I am confident that a strong national campaign of media literacy awareness and action around media violence is ready to be born.

More important is the *media literacy movement* growing out of these efforts. The Center represents the strongest voice for media literacy as violence prevention in the United States. In the past few months, we've been interviewed by the *Atlantic Monthly*, *60 Minutes*, Newhouse News Service, *Family Therapy Networker*, the *Washington Post* and even *Sesame Street* magazine. Bill Moyers sent a producer and a few (but not enough) foundations are calling.

This past July, I attended a federal conference in Washington convened by Attorney General Janet Reno, Health and Human Services Secretary Donna Shalala and Education Secretary Richard Riley. Called to explore "Violence Prevention for our Nation's Children," my working group on the media, (albeit with a bit of lobbying) unanimously included a provision that "broad-based media literacy education needs to become a priority in the U.S." and recommended federal support for "the research and development of comprehensive media literacy curriculum programs to counter the impact of media violence."

Hopefully, this planted a seed that will bear fruit in funding legislation in 1994. In the meantime, we are discussing major collaborations with representatives of the medical and mental health community, religious leaders and a coalition of women's public service groups. I am confident that a strong national campaign of media literacy awareness and action around media violence is ready to be born.

As we've worked on these two issues, I've been impressed with the number of resources on interpersonal conflict resolution now being used in schools and youth centers. But I continue to be amazed that teachers send their students home to be reprogrammed with the message that "violence is fun," the minute they turn on the television set or pick up a video game! Hopefully, media literacy can also be made available to children everywhere — and soon.

Psychologists and social critics are beginning to understand that traditional therapy breaks down when it tells people to "adjust" to a pathological society. In the same way, media that merely "reflect" a troubled society are not providing the hope and new ideas we need. We need not just the "politics of meaning," but a "media of meaning."

"We don't have to destroy our TV sets. We only have to use them with mindfulness."

Thich Nhat Hanh

The word imagine is based on the word "image." The effort to change our images is the first step in the creation of a caring culture. We invite your participation in the media literacy movement.

It is time to begin.

REFLECTION RESOURCE

TAKING A STAND

A Postcard Campaign for Nonviolent Media

By Barbara Osborn

On January 15, 1993, Mary Beth Boesen went to enjoy Denver's annual celebration for Dr. Martin Luther King, one of the U.S.' great nonviolent heroes. "It was a beautiful day," Boesen recalls. "There were speeches and a huge birthday cake. Lots of people turned up, old and young, people of all colors." The press attended too. Boesen noticed a reporter from Channel 4 News who was interviewing people about what the holiday meant to them.

After the commemoration, Boesen went home and turned on the TV news to see if she would see anyone she knew. The lead story that night on the local news was about 30 neo-Nazi counterdemonstrators who got into a screaming match with the mayor.

The second story was about another group of kids that got into a brawl and beat up a young woman and threw rocks into windows. The peaceful, joyous celebration that Boesen had attended was the third story in the news line-up.

Boesen, a member of Stand Against Violence Everywhere (SAVE) a project of the Loretto Women's Network, was furious. "That was the message kids were getting," she says. "If you're violent, you get news coverage."

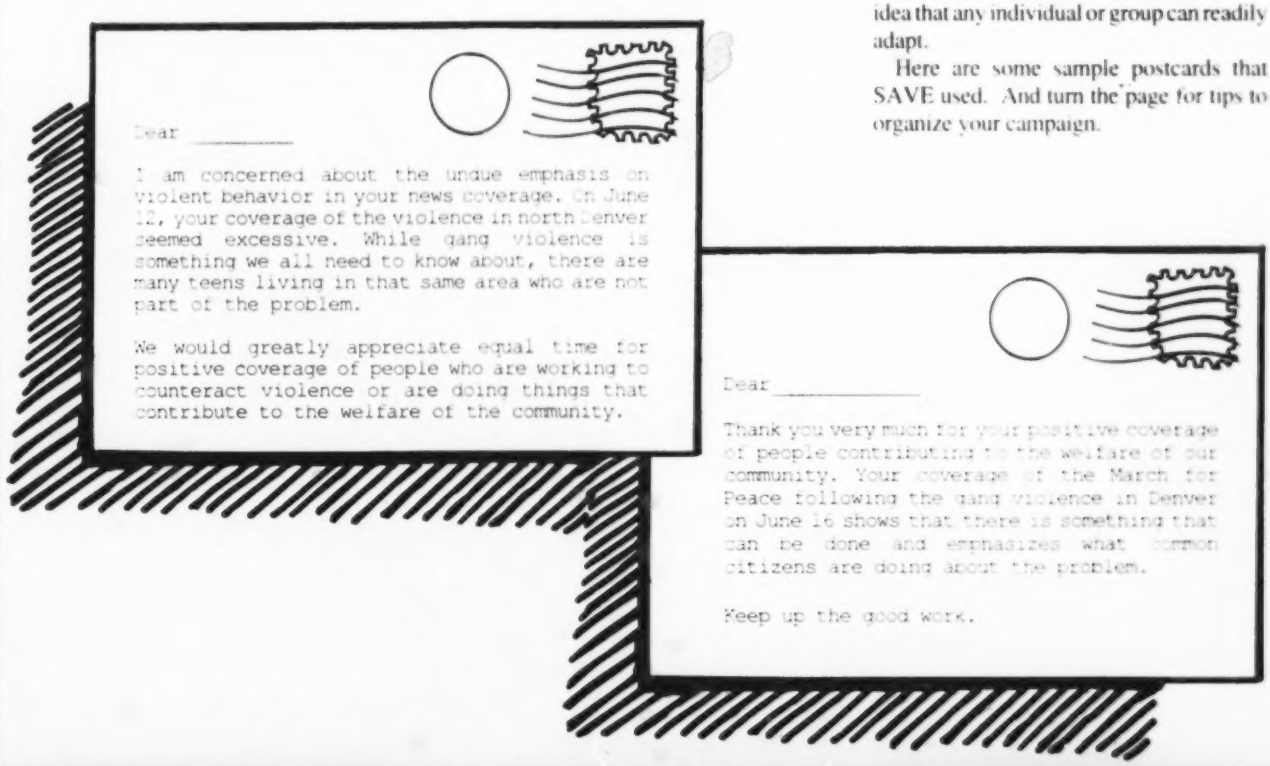
She picked up the phone and called the TV station. "I was pretty 'wrathy,'" she says, "and they finally let me talk to an associate producer." As a result of Boesen's phone call, the station re-organized and re-edited their coverage for the 10 p.m. broadcast.

"They put the peaceful demonstration first, they gave it equal time, and they cut out the kids screaming at the mayor," Boesen says.

That night was the beginning of what became a coordinated campaign among the approximately 650 members of the Loretto Women's Network. Members began sending postcards to national media and calling local media (followed up by a letter) when they saw violence glorified or when they saw a news station doing a responsible job.

Boesen and SAVE's work didn't take a lot of time or money. They use standard issue, pre-paid post office postcards. It's an idea that any individual or group can readily adapt.

Here are some sample postcards that SAVE used. And turn the page for tips to organize your campaign.



Dear _____

I am concerned about the undue emphasis on violent behavior in your news coverage. On June 12, your coverage of the violence in north Denver seemed excessive. While gang violence is something we all need to know about, there are many teens living in that same area who are not part of the problem.

We would greatly appreciate equal time for positive coverage of people who are working to counteract violence or are doing things that contribute to the welfare of the community.

Dear _____

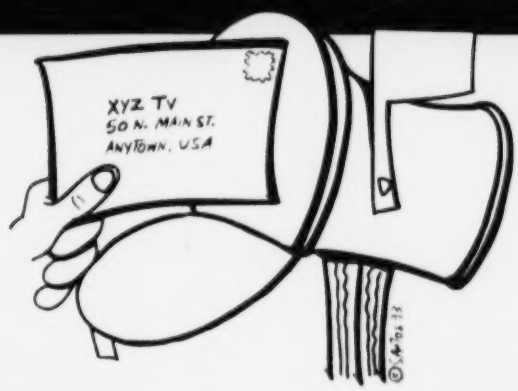
Thank you very much for your positive coverage of people contributing to the welfare of our community. Your coverage of the March for Peace following the gang violence in Denver on June 16 shows that there is something that can be done and emphasizes what common citizens are doing about the problem.

Keep up the good work.

MEMBERS MAY COPY THESE TWO PAGES
FOR DISCUSSION OR GROUP ACTIVITY

REFLECTION RESOURCE

How to Organize a Local Postcard Campaign



Are you dissatisfied with the quality of news from your local TV stations? Postcards can send a powerful message that you, the viewer, *care* about what's coming into your home.

Raise the Idea

Begin by making copies and sharing this two-page reflection resource with your PTA, church group, women's/men's group, etc. Tell Mary Beth Boesen's story and how one phone call challenged — and changed — a station's newscast. Some people may feel a campaign is hopeless but don't be discouraged. It's better to start with a few people and expand as you get more organized.

What's Involved

Each person or family must commit to putting up $1.90 for 10 19-cent postcards. These will be put on top of the television so they will be handy while viewing the news. Encourage people to start with just 10 cards so that they will feel a sense of completion quickly. Too many cards begin to feel like a never-ending chore. One person might volunteer to purchase the cards and keep a revolving fund so that you'll always have cards on hand.

Create a Media List

Two or three people should volunteer to collect addresses of local media outlets and then share the list with everyone. Check the phone book for a list of TV stations in your area. Call and ask for the name of the news director and the correct mailing address. If possible, also get the direct telephone number of the news department as the station's central number will probably be on a recorded message after normal business hours. A FAX number might also be handy.

Other sources are reference librarians or someone in public relations or advertising who will have access to local media directories. Be sure to date the publication of the list because numbers and names change often and you'll need to update it.

Develop Your Main Message

Use the postcards on the reverse side as models but encourage everyone to develop their own messages. The more individualized a card is, the more powerful its impact. Media companies tend to dismiss pre-printed postcards that flood their mailboxes. And don't just write when you want to complain. Look for coverage that is sensitive and comprehensive. Send cards of congratulations as positive reinforcement.

Be sure to follow the rules of common courtesy in writing any media contact. State clearly and specifically what you object to or what you want to applaud. If you are upset about something on TV, try to be positive but firm; abusive or derogatory language will only undermine your message.

Alternative Actions

- Contact by telephone or FAX provides immediate feedback to a station, but don't be discouraged if you don't get through, especially by phone. Use the experience to make contact the next day. Try to find out how to get through the next time.
- Be sure your group shares with each other their experiences in commenting on news and contacting stations. Celebrate your successes and learn from each other what to look for, how to express your opinion, how to follow up when a news director responds. Invite a journalism teacher to lead a workshop with your group about what makes news or how TV news is changing.
- As your group gains experience, invite a news director or a popular reporter or anchor person to be a speaker at your PTA, church or group meeting. With your growing expertise and vigilance about TV news in your community, you should have an engaging and thoughtful dialogue.

A Final Word

Remember, changing the way news is reported in your city will not happen overnight. Keep a long view and focus on small successes that can build a momentum. TV news is Big Business for local stations but each station is also responsive to the community it serves. An informed and *vocal* viewing audience can be an effective antidote to mediocrity and exploitation. *Hang in there!*

CENTER FOR MEDIA AND VALUES
1962 S. Shenandoah St., Los Angeles, CA 90034 • (310) 559-2944

Media&Values magazine is published by The Center for Media and Values, a not-for-profit educational membership organization which empowers the public by providing resources for critical awareness about media. General Membership in the Center is $35/yr. These two pages may be copied for discussion or educational purposes only. Copies must be made from an original. Further reprint permission is extended only to schools or community groups.

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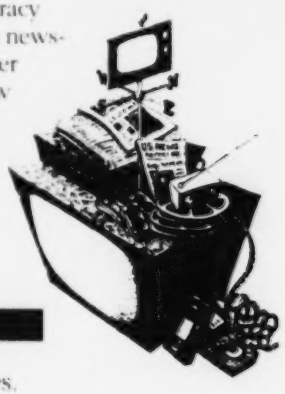

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Beyond Blame: Countering Violence in the Media

Watch for this multimedia educational resource package that links media literacy education to violence prevention.

"The effects of viewing violence on TV can be mitigated... (by) 'critical thinking skills' to better interpret what we see on television."

From "Violence and Youth," a report of the American Psychological Association.